

Graduate Students'
Committee***Guide for Teaching Assistants in History***
Finally Available Online in Both Official Languages!

The English and French versions of the *Guide for Teaching Assistants* are now available on the websites of the Canadian Historical Association and the Graduate Students' Committee (GSC). This third version of the document follows the 1992 and 2002 versions. We wish to use this space we have been given to briefly explain how the content of the guide was overhauled.

Background

The guide had to be substantially revised for a number of reasons. First of all, it was absolutely essential to convert it to a more broadly available electronic version, rather than falling back on selling single printed copies as the student committee had been doing for years. Second, the content of the guide needed updating to bring it into line with current issues and practices. Finally, there was an urgent need for a version that was both in French and tailored to the Quebec reality, given the stated wish of the CHA and its student committee to be both bilingual and pan-Canadian.

Heather Steel, a former co-Chair of the GSC and a doctoral candidate at York University, launched the project and recruited Jenny Ellison (York University), Matt Trudgen (Queen's University) and Nathan Smith (University of Toronto) to help. This team carefully reviewed the former version and identified the major changes to be made. Later in the process, Julie Perrone (Concordia University) and Olivier Côté (Université Laval) conducted their own study on the working conditions of teaching assistants in Quebec universities so as to better tailor the guide to Quebec reality. Heather Steel performed the final editing, with collaboration from Jenny Ellison.

Michel Duquet, the CHA's executive coordinator, then applied for and obtained a grant from Canadian Heritage to have the guide translated. Smart Communication produced the translation, which was proofread by Michèle Dagenais and some Francophone members of the student committee.

Jonathan Crossen, webmaster of the student committee and a doctoral candidate at the University of Waterloo, performed the final step of expertly posting the English and French versions online, which you may now consult!

We wish to thank everyone who helped complete this colossal piece of work. In most cases, their efforts were on a volunteer basis.

Content

The *Guide for Teaching Assistants* is designed to serve as a reference document for newly hired teaching assistants. The guide is divided into four parts, namely rights and responsibilities, in the classroom, evaluating your students and yourself, and teaching assistant training and orientation.

A first section addresses universities' expectations when TAs are hired. The contract between a TA and a university, which must provide detailed information on the hours of work required and the nature of the work to be performed, is discussed. A positive relationship between TAs and their course directors is also essential. The guide suggests a few ideas to foster this relationship. According to the guide, TAs' responsibilities include creating an atmosphere conducive to learning, detailing the policies, requirements and expectations of courses, and being available to students in class and during their office hours. Also mentioned are TAs' rights with respect to sexual harassment and to conflicts with course directors, departments or educational institutions.

The second part of the guide contains extensive advice designed to enable TAs to perform their duties with confidence. Even before they lead a single seminar, the guide provides them with a few suggestions on preparing a syllabus, planning lessons or lectures, and identifying relevant audiovisual elements. With the TAs' first course come other duties such as taking attendance, determining the physical layout of the classroom, and delivering a detailed presentation of the course. A few very relevant tips are provided to help new TAs overcome the jitters they often experience. The guide explains how to prepare seminars, proposes different possible structures, and suggests ideas for solving problems in class.

The next section discusses the evaluation of students and TAs. Various methods for correcting students' work are also covered. A short final section discusses TA training — not only the training provided by universities but also the more targeted training that may be provided by history departments. The advice in the guide will help TAs benefit from this wonderful experience — whether they receive this advice in the context of an orientation session or training workshop or even through reading on their own.

Julie Perrone and Olivier Côté

Co-Chairs of the Graduate Students' Committee